

Testimony on House Bill 225
Representative Chuck Hunter, Sponsor

This bill is about collective bargaining in the public sector.

But more broadly, this bill is about ensuring public safety during a time when public sector employees and public sector employers are having contract disputes.

House bill 225 will

- prohibit deputy sheriffs from striking, or recognizing picket lines while in the performance of their offices duties, and
- it will provide a timely and effective procedure for resolving labor disputes – binding arbitration

Binding arbitration is a well known method of resolving labor disputes, both in the private and the public sector, and is already in use for two other groups of public sector employees who work in the important field of *public safety*: firefighters and police officers.

Firefighters have used binding arbitration since 1979, when the legislature adopted this practice for resolving their contract disputes, and limited their ability to strike.

In 2005, Speaker Bergren proposed, and the legislature adopted, both binding arbitration and the prohibition against strikes for police officers.

This bill proposes to add deputy sheriffs to the same act established for police officers. Why?

As in 1979, and in 2005, the issue is public safety.

I believe we want our public safety employees to be on the job and protecting the public.

We don't want them away from work on a strike, or away from work because of a lock-out due to a labor dispute.

Binding arbitration is efficient, effective, and has a proven track record in the public safety arena.

It provides both a mechanism for and an inducement to reach a settlement between the parties during contract negotiations.

It typically leads both parties in a labor dispute to narrow their focus down to the crucial, core issues that need to be resolved.

Many public jurisdictions, and many contracts involving deputy sheriffs have already moved to binding arbitration, by including in their labor contracts.

This bill would make the process mandatory, and uniform across Montana, by adding deputy sheriffs to the existing statutes regarding police officers.

Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee, you will not find a consensus on the topic.

You will hear both proponents and opponents. We also have an expert informational witness in John Andrew from the Department of Labor and Industry.

I look forward to their testimony, and your questions, and I would like to reserve my right to close